



Preventing the Flu

Strategies and Resources for Child Care Providers and Out-of-Home Caregivers of Children Less Than 2 Years Old

Influenza, known more commonly as "the flu," is caused by the Influenza virus, which infects the respiratory tract (nose, throat, and lungs). Unlike many other viral respiratory infections, such as the common cold, the flu can cause severe illness and life threatening complications in many people. In an average year, the flu causes 36,000 deaths and 226,000 hospitalizations. Because the Influenza virus changes from year to year and infection with one strain does not provide protection against all strains, annual vaccination against Influenza is recommended. Additional information on Influenza and Influenza vaccine is available at www.cispimmunize.org.

Recent studies have shown that children less than 2 years old — even previously healthy children — are more likely than older children to end up in the hospital with serious complications if they get the flu. These complications can include pneumonia (an illness in which the lungs get infected and inflamed), dehydration (when a child is too sick to drink enough fluids and her body loses too much water), worsening of long-term medical problems like heart disease or asthma, encephalopathy (a disease of the brain), sinus problems, and ear infections. In rare cases, complications from the flu can lead to death.

Because children are at increased risk of getting severe illness from the flu, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that all children 6 months to 23 months old get a flu shot. (Flu shots are not approved for use in children less than 6 months old.) Also, household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of children less than 2 years old should get vaccinated against the flu. This is particularly important for contacts of children less than 6 months of age, because children less than 6 months old cannot be vaccinated themselves and cannot be given antiviral medications to treat the flu.

I. Advice for Child Care Providers and Out-of-Home Caregivers:

Get Vaccinated

If you live with or care for a child less than 2 years old, you are in a priority group for flu vaccination. There are two types of Influenza vaccines:

- The "flu shot" — an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle — is approved for use in people older than 6 months, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions.
- The nasal-spray flu vaccine — a vaccine made with live, weakened Influenza virus — is approved for use in healthy people, 5-49 years of age, who are not pregnant.

October or November is the best time to get vaccinated, but you can still get vaccinated in December and later. Flu season can begin as early as October and last as late as May. The ability of flu vaccine to protect a person depends on the age and health status of the person getting the vaccine, and the similarity or "match" between the virus strains in the vaccine and those in circulation. Testing has shown that both vaccines are effective at preventing the flu.

Possible Vaccine Side Effects: Different side effects can be associated with the flu shot and the live attenuated (weakened) Influenza vaccine (LAIV). The viruses in the flu shot are killed (inactivated), so you cannot get the flu from a flu shot. Some minor side effects that could occur are: soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given; low-grade fever, and aches. If these problems occur, they begin soon after the shot and usually last one to two days. Possible side effects with LAIV include cold-like symptoms, such as headache, cough, sore throat, tiredness/weakness, irritability, and muscle aches. Almost all people who get Influenza vaccine have no serious problems from it. However, a vaccine may rarely cause serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions.

****There are some people who should not be vaccinated with LAIV. These include:**

- People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs
- People who have had a severe reaction to an Influenza vaccination in the past
- People who developed Guillain-Barré syndrome within 6 weeks of getting an Influenza vaccine previously
- Children less than 6 months of age

Practice Good Health Habits

Certain good health habits can help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses like the flu.

Protect yourself and your child by following these steps routinely:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze—throw the tissue away after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, and as soon as possible after you cough or sneeze on them. If you are not near water, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Keep you and your baby away from people who are coughing or sneezing, as much as you can.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth since germs can spread this way.

II. Advice for Caregivers Who Get the Flu:

In addition to vaccination, if you live with or care for a child less than 2 years old, follow the precautions below to help to prevent the spread of illness to your child.

Remember How the Flu Spreads

The main way that flu spreads is in respiratory droplets from coughing and sneezing. This can happen when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled through the air and infect someone nearby. Though much less frequent, the flu may also spread through indirect contact with respiratory droplets.

Follow These Steps

If you get flu-like symptoms, which can include a fever, headache, tiredness, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, or body aches* follow the precautions below:

- Check with your health-care provider. (If you have Influenza, your doctor may prescribe antiviral medications for you.)

- If you work in child care, do not go to work if you become sick.
- Try to minimize contact with your child as much as possible.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing or coughing, and put your used tissue in a waste basket.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water and as soon as possible after you sneeze or cough on them. If you are not near water use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Take these precautions for the first 5 days of your illness (beginning the first day you notice symptoms).

*Note: these symptoms alone or with fever often are caused by other factors, such as the common cold, not Influenza virus. Individuals need not minimize contact with children when suffering from the common cold.

Incubation and Contagious Periods

The incubation period for flu is 1-3 days. The contagious period is from the day before signs/symptoms appear until 7 days after the onset of flu.

Important Information About Children with Influenza

Excluding children from group settings is not necessary unless –

- The child is unable to participate and staff determine that they cannot care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the health and safety of the other children in the group
- The child meets other exclusion criteria, such as fever with behavior changes

When exclusion criteria are resolved, the child is able to participate, and staff determine that they can care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the health and safety of the other children in the group. For more information, see the *AAP Quick Reference Guide to Coding for Infectious Diseases*.

Be Watchful

Observe your child closely for symptoms of respiratory illness. If he/she develops a fever (100°F or higher under the arm, 101°F orally, or 102°F rectally), respiratory symptoms, or are less responsive than normal, contact your child's doctor.

ASK YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT ANTIVIRAL MEDICATIONS

Three antiviral drugs (amantadine, rimantadine, and oseltamivir) are approved for use in preventing the flu. These are prescription medications, and a doctor should be consulted before they are used.

****SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES: SMOKING AND INFLUENZA**

Some studies show that smokers are more likely to get the flu, and there is a higher mortality rate from the flu among smokers than among nonsmokers. If you (or someone you know) are a smoker – get vaccinated.



Influenza Resources for Child Care Providers and Out-of-Home Caregivers

Influenza FAQs

This resource answers common questions that parents have regarding Influenza and the Influenza vaccine shortage. Questions include: 1) I've heard reports that there is a flu shortage. Should my child be vaccinated even with the shortage? If so, when? and 2) What are some practical ways to reduce the spread of the Influenza virus? Available at: www.cispimmunize.org/fam/facts/FAQ_3.pdf

Patient Screening Form – Do I Need Any Vaccinations Today?

Adults need shots, too! It is important for adults at highest risk of serious illness or death from the flu, those in close contact with children, or others in high-risk populations get a flu shot. Review this form to determine if you should or should not get a flu shot. Available at: <http://www.immunize.org/catg.d/4036need.pdf>

Child Care Materials:

Quick Reference Guide to Coding for Infectious Diseases

This quick reference guide provides fast, convenient information for pediatric coding and documentation for common childhood infections and immunizations! The book, *Quick Reference Guide to Pediatric Coding and Documentation for Infectious Diseases*, is edited by Margaret K. Ikeda, MD, FAAP and Joel Bradley, MD, FAAP comes with a free handy pocket guide that includes the most common ICD-9-CM codes for infectious diseases. For more information and ordering details, [click here](#).

Child care providers can take steps to prevent themselves and their children from contracting the flu. The National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care offers the latest developments in child care to out-of-home child care providers and parents. Available at: <http://nrc.uchsc.edu/>

The site also offers an online version of *Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care, 2nd Edition*, which provides specific steps to promote immunization and prevent the spread of disease. Available at: <http://nrc.uchsc.edu/CFOC/index.html>

A quick reference guide, *Managing Infectious Diseases in Child Care and Schools*, presents information on preventing, identifying, and responding to infectious disease in child care and schools. To order, visit <http://www.healthychildcare.org/>

School Materials and Posters

Educators, staff, and parents can help slow the spread of colds and flu. The CDC offers information on preventing the flu, as well as, materials and tools for schools. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/>

For direct questions regarding flu, or flu vaccine, ask your doctor or nurse. They can give you the vaccine package insert or suggest other sources of information. Additional resources include calling your local or state health department or contacting the CDC at 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit: www.cdc.gov/flu

For additional immunization information, visit
AAP Childhood Immunization Support Program
www.cispimmunize.org